

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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The Church and You **Romans 12:1-8 (Part 2)**

1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Last week we began to look at this topic of our relationship to the church. Let me remind you of this important truth as we move ahead. If you are a Christian, if you truly have trusted in the work of Christ on the cross as your only means and your only merit of heaven, having recognized yourself as a sinner in need of Christ's work alone and God's grace alone for your salvation, then you must also realize that God did not save you to be neutral in this present life. God does not save us from worldliness, from sin, from self and from Satan so that we might just exist in some middle ground where we see ourselves as not worldly, but neither do we quite see ourselves as blood-bought saints, or at least seem to experience the fullness of the Christian life that we read about in the Scriptures.

If you are like me then I hope you desire much more; to desire living for Christ in ways that are not ordinary, not “normal”, not “natural” but rather extra-ordinary, and supernatural. I believe the statement of our Lord Jesus in John 10:10 when He said, **“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”** I believe in the statement of the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:9-10 when he wrote, **“For in Him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete [full]...”**

But the question before us is how do we experience these truths of being full, complete and overflowing in Christ so that we can know we are living the abundant life Jesus promises? Where are we to experience such things? How does the abundant life manifest itself?

These are wonderful questions to ponder, but we are not left simply to ponder. We are called to know and to obey the revealed will of God. God has told us; God has spoken to us; God has informed us of how to live the abundant life of Jesus. The question for us will be simply this, “will we obey?” Will we passionately pursue the very things God has promised will give us joy and fullness? In what do we find this fullness?

We have been discussing as of late our relationship to and our participation in the Church. In our study of Colossians 1:24-27, we found the apostle Paul speaking about his passion for the church and have seen that his passion is not to be limited or unique to him. Rather it is to be the experience of every believer in Jesus Christ.

To see this truth, we left our study in Colossians 1 and looked last week at Romans 12:1-3 and from there we saw that in light of all that God has accomplished for us in Christ, in saving us, in fixing us, in adopting us, in fitting us for heaven; our response [in view of the mercies of God] is to be one of sold out passion in serving Him. [pause]. Paul calls it our **“spiritual service of worship”** in Romans

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12:1. I know that there is not one person in here who has any inkling to follow Christ who would knowingly refuse to consider how he or she might rightly worship God by serving Him. But what does this spiritual service of worship look like? How can we know if we are serving God spiritually?

Beginning in Romans 12:3 and moving on through verse 8, we see that the very first means by which every believer is called to demonstrate his or her spiritual service of worship to God is by being rightly connected to and faithfully participating in the Church, the body of Christ. Beloved, if you are a believer, then you are “in Christ” – in His body. If you have been called out of the world, you have been called into the body of Christ. And as we saw last week in Romans 12:3, everyone who have been called by God’s grace is to have right thinking about himself and the **“measure of faith”** or the spiritual gift that God has given him for the benefit of the church. This was the first of three points we are looking at from Romans 12:3-8, that the church needs to have right thinking about spiritual gifts. We saw that every believer has at least one **“measure of faith”** and therefore is to be working diligently to know and to practice that divine enablement for the benefit of the church. If you are “in Christ” then you are in the Church. And if you are in the church, you cannot think less of yourself or more than yourself, but are to know that you have and must contribute to the common good of the body. So the questions we were to consider last week were this, do you know your spiritual gift or gifts; your measure of faith? Do you believe that God gave you that gift or gifts by His purpose and grace to benefit the whole church? And, are you working to see that your gift or gifts are increasingly used to benefit the church? This is clear thinking concerning spiritual gifts.

So this morning we move from this first point into verses 4-8 and to examine the final two points of this text. After considering individually our thinking concerning spiritual gifts, in verses 4 and 5, we find Paul calling the church to corporate thinking about spiritual gifts, meaning that our spiritual gifts must be understood and practiced in the context of the body of Christ. And then finally we will see Paul calling the church to the consistent practice of spiritual gifts in verses 6-8 focusing on the attitudes and actions that are appropriate to specific spiritual gifts.

- I. The Church needs clear thinking about spiritual gifts (12:3)
- II. The Church needs corporate thinking about spiritual gifts (12:4-5)
- III. The Church needs consistent practice of spiritual gifts (12:6-8)

Let us move now to our second point as we look at our relationship to the church.

II. The Church needs corporate thinking about spiritual gifts (12:4-5)

4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

If there is one word that best summarizes our culture and age, I believe that word would be “self.” Self seems to permeate everything. Whether we are talking about low “self”-esteem or being self-centered, our culture thrives on what self can get, what self can accomplish and what self can feel. Being so self-focused, our culture prizes independence, personal self-freedom. We want to do what we want, when we want, how we want. In the name of freedom, self-expression and individuality, almost anything is “acceptable” including deviant alternative lifestyles (a pc term for sinful lifestyles) like homosexuality, abortion and such. Even marriages are redefined in our culture as neither husbands nor wives want to give up any independence. Such selfishness and personal independence is turning into the beginning stages of anarchy, a state where everyone does what is right in his own eyes. The result is that the public or common good of our culture is sacrificed on the altar of individual freedom.

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Now you might be wondering why I am getting all worked up about this. I say to you that when we as believers are constantly bombarded by this kind of thinking, unless we are intentional, unless we purpose to do otherwise, such thinking will find its way in some form or another in the church corporately. We tend to speak and emphasize our “personal” relationship to Christ and concern ourselves little with the overwhelming teaching of the New Testament of the corporate nature and relationship believers are to have with one another and Christ. The Bride of Christ pays a dear price being weak and poor when she has all the resources of her Bridegroom at her disposal. And why is this, because we can tend to be selfish. In great simplicity Spurgeon said that “to be selfish is to be wicked.” To be selfish is to emphasize personal individualism over corporate experience.

And here in Romans 12:4-5 we see a call to think differently than the world and the culture around us. If “individualism” is the way of the world, then the way of the Church is clearly “interdependency.” As believers we know it would be wrong and sinful to seek to live in a state of independence from Christ, right? If a brother or sister in Christ came to you and said, “I love Jesus Christ, but I don’t intend to do the things He asks of me or to concern myself with the things that concern Him” our response would be, you have a sin problem, a self-problem, an “I” problem that needs correction. Beloved, it is not different with the church. If we seek to live in a state of independence from the Church, Christ’s body, if we are not seeking purposely and passionately to benefit the church with the divine gifts given to us as often as possible, we have a sinful self problem.

We have each been given a “**measure of faith**” – spiritual gifts. Do you realize that by being given a divine enablement by which you can benefit the church means that you are simultaneously both weak and strong? You are strong in what God has enabled you to do to benefit the church. And you are weak in the areas in which you have not been gifted. And so we must see that it is only as each member of the body of Christ serves, waits on, ministers to one another that our strengths benefit others and our weaknesses are compensated for. This is what Paul is driving at in verses 4-5;

4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

We are dependent, not independent. It is nothing more than thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think to say that you can rightly serve and love God without being dependent upon other believers. And so, if these measures of faith, these spiritual gifts that God give each of us are to work properly, we must cease thinking individualistically and begin to think interdependently. We are not islands but one continent. We are not like simple single-celled amoebas, but like complex multi-celled organisms. We here are members one of another, each given divine enablements by which we might dutifully and delightfully carry out the functions necessary to equip the body of Christ for continued ministry to one another and to a lost and dying world. And let me say that we are not looking for cookie-cutter Christians. We all have individuality, we are many members, all with a different experiences and gifting, and therefore we all have individual roles to play. But individuality in the body leaves no room individualism, for maverick Christians. Do you know what a maverick is? The word maverick comes from a Texas cattle man, Samuel Augustus Maverick who lived in the early 1800’s. He left his cattle unbranded, unmarked, and was unwilling to do it evidently because he felt had no need to if everyone else’s cattle was branded. He refused to follow the cattleman’s etiquette of branding one’s cattle. Thus to be a maverick was to be known as one who refuses to abide by the dictates of or resists the adherence to a group. To be a maverick is to be a dissenter or to be masterless. We are not to be mavericks doing our own thing without thought to the group. Instead

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we are to be considerate and to rely on the other members of the body and realize that they are relying on us.

As believers in Christ, we are chosen, called, justified, and adopted by God as individuals. But then we are placed into the body of Christ. We are joined to, literally glued to a body, the body of Christ [see Acts 5:13 – “associate, join, glued”]. We must think and act as members one of another knowing that what we do, or do not do, affects each one of us. And the practice of our measures of faith, our spiritual gifts is one of the key means by which the body of Christ is to function and through which the very life and teachings of our Lord Jesus are revealed both among us and to the world. The church needs to be thinking corporately.

III. The Church needs consistent practice of spiritual gifts (12:6-8)

6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

In Romans 12:6-8 we are presented with a partial listing of the spiritual gifts. This is not an exhaustive list. Not every spiritual gift is noted here as we find both some of the same as well as some different gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. Notice how verse 6 begins. Paul says, “**Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...**” Never forget that it is God that has allotted to each of us a “measure of faith” and by His grace has gifted each one. This is an important truth – namely that spiritual gifts have nothing to do with personal ambition. We are not presented with a “wish” list from which we make a choice and then work for that gift. The gift(s) we have received have been sovereignly bestowed by God’s grace and God’s own determination. Whether you know it or not, if you are a believer, you already have right now at least one gift. And remember that God not only graces you with that gift but also gives you the faith to exercise that gift. And so remember that not to use your gift, or to complain that your gift is not what you want, or beyond your abilities it to question the sovereign will of God. According to 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 11, it is God who has determined what gift or gifts you have for the common good of the body. Every gift is meant to contribute to the overall well being of the body. Not one gift is to be diminished but rather exercised fully.

Notice how verses 6-8 are arranged to excite in us the practice of these gifts. To read and see it another way:

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us,
each of us is to exercise them accordingly:
if prophecy — according to the proportion of his faith;
if service — in his serving;
or he who teaches — in his teaching;
or he who exhorts — in his exhortation;
he who gives — with liberality;
he who leads — with diligence;
he who shows mercy — with cheerfulness.

The beginning of verse six is simply the tie in with what Paul said in verse 3-5, if we have right thinking about the spiritual gifts as individuals and as a church, then, beginning with the last have of verse 6 on into verse 8, fully practice those gifts. I also take the end of verse six as setting up two

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major categories of spiritual gifts. First, there are the spoken gifts, called “prophecy” – which does not speak of foretelling the future but rather with the proclamation of spiritual truth. The second category includes the serving gifts, gifts of service and of helps. We see Peter make a similar distinction between the gifts in 1 Peter 4:10-11;

10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Looking back at Romans 12:6-8 then; the end of verse 7 and beginning of verse 8 reveal the gifts of teaching and exhorting, which would be specialized gifts of prophecy or spoken gifts, while the remaining gifts of giving, leading and showing mercy would fall under the category of serving gifts.

Let us look at some aspects of these gifts. Notice that the gift of prophecy and therefore of teaching and exhortation, come with a major word of warning. These gifts are to be exercised **“according to the proportion of his faith.”** From this we would conclude that Paul is simply saying, “keep within the boundaries of the revealed Word of God.” This could be translated, “according to the proportion of the faith” meaning that it seeks to stay within the guidelines of both God’s Word and God’s will. We are to be content with the circumstances in which we have the opportunity to exercise the spoken gifts.

This statement could also mean that these spoken gifts are to be “in agreement with,” the faith. The idea is that whatever is spoken is never to contradict or undermine the Scriptures. All who speak are to do so in a way completely consistent with Scripture. Paul seems to be saying the same thing to the Corinthians when he writes in 1 Corinthians 4:6

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

The danger identified here is of exceeding or of going beyond “what is written.” Such an exercise is called arrogance and it is the very thing Paul is warning us about here in Romans 12.

Even the gifts of service are to be exercised accordingly, done with maximum effort as we like to say to the youth group. When you have one of the service gifts, you are to concern yourself with fully carrying out that service. Our temptation is to sit back and to critique or correct our brothers and sisters works of service rather than to be fully carrying out our own. We can find ourselves saying things like, “Well, if I were to run the nursery, or if I were to do the music, or if I were to plan this event, then I would have....” To be sure, there is a time and place for constructive criticism, but no one who is not actively engaged in service has that right. Remember that verse 6 says that “each of us is to exercise them [our own gifts] accordingly.”

So, we have these two categories of gifts, “prophecy” – of proclaiming the message and truth of God; and “service” – of helping, aiding, serving one another with a specific gift. Then in verses 7b and 8a Paul delineates the speaking gifts of teaching and exhorting. The one with the gift of teaching should devote himself to teaching. The one with the gift of exhortation is to devote himself to exhortation.

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The gift of teaching is simply the special ability to interpret and present God's truth understandably. The gift of exhortation is the special ability to come along side another to advise, plead with, encourage, warn strengthen and/or comfort. To have the gift of exhortation does not mean that person does all of those, but at least one or more by the grace of God for the benefit of the church. Those who teach, are to teach and keep teaching. Those who exhort are to exhort and keep exhorting. The call is to stick with it, not to give up, not to stop

The gift of giving does not imply that only those with this gift are to give to the benefit of the body. We are all called to give of time and resources. But there is a spiritual gift that enables a person to share or impart that which is his own in a fashion that is attributed to godliness. The call for this person is to give "with liberality" or "generously." If you are ready from the NASB, you might notice the marginal reading is that the one who gives is to do so "with simplicity." The idea seems to be that such giving is to be with unmixed motives. Giving is to be generous and sacrificial. The generous giver must be wary of having any ulterior motives, perhaps to be seen or to be esteemed. Remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. They gave with mixed motives and thus became deceptive and dishonest. They were not as generous as they wished to appear. Such a giver is to give to the glory of God and for the benefit of the recipient, not for his own gain.

The gift of leading, to stand before others with the intent to guide and direct, comes with the exhortation to be done "with diligence." Unlike the world leadership where the leader generally leads to enhance his own position, the spiritual leader is not seeking to promote himself. Spiritual leadership is servant leadership. Servant leadership finds its rewards more often in the knowledge of obedience to God rather than grand praise from men. The servant leader is to be diligent, that is, he is to devote maximum effort in serving others in a way that guides and directs them to follow hard after Christ. I see the call to diligence as a warning against half-hearted leadership. If you are called to lead in some area of the church, do it with diligence.

The final gift we will look at from our text is that of mercy. The gift of mercy is the divine ability to demonstrate sympathy for another in their circumstance as well as having the resources by which to comfort that person. It is interesting that the warning here is to show mercy with "cheerfulness" or gladness. Often times, one who is in need of mercy is not the most pleasant person to be around. Sometimes they are even slow to show any gratitude for any measure of mercy shown to them. And so the temptation will be for the one who has this gift to become cynical and hard. Remember that spiritual gifts are grace gifts from God, they are to reveal the grace of God in our lives.

We must be careful that whether we have spoken gifts or service gifts that we always seek to devote ourselves entirely to what we are gifted to do. We must also be careful never to exercise our gifts in a manner that is inconsistent with the grace of God, remembering that our gifts are sovereignly given by God to benefit the whole church and to glorify Him.

As we close, let me just ask you a few questions that result from looking at these verses. Knowing that our text is addressing genuine believers who have been divinely gifted to benefit the church, let me ask you if you have first received God's gift of eternal life by acknowledging yourself to be a sinner and of Christ having died for your sins on the cross and that by believing this knowing that God will change your heart and cause you to pursue a life of Christlikeness? Are you truly born again? You see, if you are not, then the topic of spiritual gifts is a mute point because until you are saved, you have no spiritual gift. You may have wonderful natural abilities that you or other mistake for spiritual gifts, but unless you know you are saved, you are simply fooling yourself and others and are ultimately harming yourself and the church.

The next question I would ask is this, are you pursuing the practice of your spiritual gift for the glory of God and the benefit of the church. Do you know your gift or gifts? If you do, is your gift used

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only when convenient or do you consistently seek to use it for the common good of the body. Remember that Romans 12:1 speaks of offering ourselves as living sacrifices. And so, out of gratitude to the mercies of God, are you pursuing sacrificially to serve God by serving others by means of the spiritual gift(s) God has given you? If you do not know your spiritual gift, your divine stewardship, your measure of faith, your place of service in and to the local body, why not?

And finally, how connected are you to a local church and to the broader body of Christ so that your gift may benefit others and so that you may draw from the strengths and gifts of others? Remember that God does approve of maverick Christians and spiritual gifts are not given so that we may set ourselves above or apart from the rest of the body. Our spiritual gifts remind us that we are interdependent upon one another. Do you see and experience this? How? If not, why not? What are you doing in obedience to this passage to fulfill your responsibilities to the body of Christ?

Beloved, spiritual gifts are not intended to be a mystery but are given to be employed in serving one another. God does not hide the gifts. It is time to know and practice the gifts. Let us all look for needs within the body and seek to meet them. When you see someone struggling with something or notice something that needs to be done, then seek to serve in that area. Remember that spiritual gifts are given in order to meet the needs of others and how many of those others have needs? All of them. Let us pray for eyes to see those needs for obedient hearts to respond to them by God's grace and power.

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly...

Soli Deo Gloria

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